

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA) was joined by Rep. Robert Matsui (D-CA) and more than 30 additional colleagues to introduce the Workers with Disabilities Opportunity Act of 2003. This important legislation would make Medicare Part A coverage permanent for working beneficiaries with disabilities who qualify for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).

“For too long, we have unfairly treated people with disabilities in the American workforce,” Stark said. “Under current law, many Americans who receive Social Security disability insurance benefits lose their health insurance coverage if they go back into the workforce for longer than 8.5 years. What the federal government is saying to people with disabilities is that they can stay home and keep their health insurance or they can go to work and lose it. Under our bill, no worker with a disability who qualifies for SSDI would be forced to quit work in order to keep their Medicare coverage.”

When non-working adults with disabilities were asked in the National Health Interview Survey why they were discouraged from working, over one in five replied that they simply feared losing their health insurance. While many companies offer health benefits for their workers, oftentimes the employer-provided plan is not nearly enough to cover what a person with disabilities needs on a day-by-day basis.

The Census Bureau’s 2002 report notes that only 24% of American adults with disabilities are employed compared to 77% of other Americans. The National Organization on Disability reports that despite major advances in disability services and technologies, less than 1% of Social Security Disability Insurance enrollees leave the rolls each year to return to work.

“Under the current Ticket-to-Work and Work Incentives Act, Medicare coverage only extends for 8.5 years after a worker with disability returns to work,” Stark said. “Unfortunately, a person’s disability usually stays with them for considerably longer. This bill responds to this reality by making Ticket-to-Work permanent. This will give Americans with disabilities a real ticket to work, rather than pulling the rug out from underneath them after eight and a half years.”